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Identical letters dated 22 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I write to you to convey Israel's strong protest following the escalation on the ground in southern Israel in the past few days, initiated by the Hamas terror organization.

The latest escalation took place only a few days after the Security Council adopted resolution 1850 (2008). While we were all highly pleased with the positive progress that had been made during the past year in promoting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, Hamas announced the end of the "state of calm".

This is a serious development that endangers peace and stability in the region. The responsibility for these alarming developments lies exclusively with Hamas, as was already mentioned by the Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Quartet in his briefing to the Security Council on 18 December 2008.

Prior to and following the announcement of the end of the "state of calm" on 19 December 2008, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations — including the Palestinian Islamic Jihad — increased the frequency and intensity of their attacks from the Gaza Strip against the civilian population in southern Israel. Over 100 rockets and mortars have been launched against Israeli towns and cities in the past five days alone.

Let me mention again — as I did in my speech to the Security Council on 18 December — that the year 2008 has witnessed a record number of more than 2,900 rockets and mortar shells that were launched from the Gaza Strip targeting Israeli territory.

Israel is interested in continuing the "state of calm" and has thus far demonstrated restraint in its response to the current escalation. However, under article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Israel has the full right to defend itself and the security of its citizens from such attacks. Israel will not tolerate a situation in which Israeli citizens become hostages of a terrorist organization.

While determined to protect the lives of its citizens, Israel will continue to provide the people of Gaza with their basic humanitarian needs.

Let me stress, in conclusion, that the Hamas terrorist organization bears the sole responsibility for the situation of the inhabitants of Gaza, as it continues to

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launch rockets from within civilian centres in Gaza. The terrorists even attack the crossings that facilitate the transfer of goods into the Gaza Strip.

I should be grateful if you could have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gabriela **Shalev**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative